

Bush nursing began in Victoria in 1911 with a nurse being located at Beech Forest.

In 1910 the Victorian Bush Nursing Association was established to stimulate country communities to co-operate to employ a fully trained nurse to provide skilled health care.

They were established in local communities that raised sufficient funds and resources to attract and employ a nurse. Community fundraising paid for the nurses and capital infrastructure.

Bush nursing centres and hospitals were managed by local committees elected by contributing members.

The bush nursing model shared co-operative values, principles and characteristics - independence, autonomous, voluntary and democratic.

While sharing these values, bush nursing did not explicitly identify with the co-operative movement and remained a co-operative initiative outside the official co-operative movement.

In sharing these, however, bush nursing can be identified as a significant phase in the development of co-operatives in Australia/

The history of Australia's co-operative movement has witnessed at least five distinct phases representing different momentums in the progress of co-operation:

- Friendly societies since the 1830's.
- Retail co-operatives from the 1860's throughout Australia.
- Dairy co-operatives since the 1880's.
- Bush nursing centres and hospitals from 1910 in Victoria and NSW.
- The emergence of Catholic cooperation, particularly credit unions, since the 1940's through the National Catholic Rural Movement, the Antigonish Movement and the YCW Co-operative Movement.

Since its formation bush nursing has experienced the challenge of adapting to government policies and procedures to centralise the control of health services.

By the end of 1914 twenty centres had been established. In 1923 there were 47 centres. By 1935 there were 45 hospitals and 24 centres.

Since the 1960's some bush nursing hospitals transferred into the public system - Korumburra in 1961, Leongatha in 1962, Lismore in 1965, Bright in 1983 and Anglesea in 1985.

The 1970's saw the development of Community Health Centres providing primary health care services. The Community Health Centre model expanded and the Bush Nursing Centre's

declined. Some BNC's amalgamated with larger agencies such as neighbourhood hospitals or Community Health Centres.

The Syme-Townsend enquiry into health services in 1973 and 1974 recommended that the large bush nursing hospitals, such as Lilydale and Mornington, should be taken into the public sector. In 1978, for instance, Ensay converted to a community health centre.

In 1983 bush nursing hospitals accounted for one third of the state's acute hospitals.

In the official history of the VBNA, Susan Priestley reported that in the 1980's the hospitals and centres were progressively seeking incorporation under the Associations Incorporation Act 1981 and that it was hoped that the incorporation could strengthen their future independence. It did not

While having the characteristics of co-operatives, the hospitals and centres chose not to incorporate under co-operative legislation - a clear indication they they did not see themselves as co-operatives,

By the 1980's hospitals associated with bush nursing in other states had either closed or been absorbed into the public system.

In the 1990's Community Health Centres began their decline and they were absorbed within hospitals and health networks. Governments were less interested in a community alternative to mainstream health care and, instead, now facilitated the absorption of community health within the mainstream.

In 2002 the 13 Bush Nursing Centres in Victoria employed 55 nurses and provided primary health assessment and treatment, home nursing and personal care, social support and meals to 4200 people.

In 2002 the Victorian Department of Human Services Bush Nursing Centres Project Final Report concluded that "Bush Nursing Centres provide responsive and flexible services close to home, are an important referral point for people needing services away from home, are highly valued institutions in small rural communities contributing significantly to both people's sense of security and the economy and were cost effective and financially viable."

The Bush Nursing Centres and hospitals continue to be incorporated community based non-profit associations governed by voluntary committees of management.

An example of the continuation of bush nursing is Euroa Health Inc. While no longer called a bush nursing centre, Euroa Health Inc remains committed to the enduring structures and characteristics that began with the establishment of a Bush Nursing Hospital in Euroa in 1927.

Euroa Health Inc is a community hospital serving Euroa and surrounding districts. In 1927 it began as a Bush Nursing Hospital.

For 75 years the structure of governance has been unchanged. Euroa Health is legally owned by its members and the board of directors is elected by the members.

Euroa Health has continued to develop, reinvent and expand since its establishment. From 6 beds in 1927, today Euroa has a 91 bed facility - 24 acute, 30 Amaroo Nursing Home beds, 37 Euroaville Hostel beds and is providing community services through Family day care (child care) and Gilbon Day Therapy Centre.

Euroa Health Inc,  
Victoria

The remaining 13 bush nursing hospitals in 2005:

- Ballan & District Soldiers' Memorial Bush Nursing Ballan & District Soldiers' Memorial Bush Nursing 33 Cowie Street BALLAN 3342 (03) 5368 1100 6
- Chiltern Bush Nursing Hospital Chiltern Bush Nursing Hospital Inc Main Street CHILTERN 3683 (03) 5726 1405
- Cobden District Health Services Inc Cobden District Health Services Inc 5 Victoria Street COBDEN 3266 (03) 5595 1300
- Euroa Health Inc Euroa Hospital Inc 36 Kennedy Street EUROA 3666 (03) 5795 2176
- Heyfield Hospital Inc Heyfield Bush Nursing Hospital Inc Tyson Road HEYFIELD 3858 (03) 5148 2401
- Nagambie Hospital Inc Nagambie Hospital Inc 22 Church Street NAGAMBIE 3608 (03) 5794 2604
- Neerim District Soldiers Memorial Hospital Inc Neerim District Soldiers Memorial Hospital Inc Main Road NEERIM SOUTH 3831 (03) 5628 1226
- Sea Lake & District Health Service Inc Sea Lake & District Health Service Inc 33-43 McClelland Avenue SEA LAKE 3533 (03) 5070 2155
- The Bays Hospital - Hastings The Bays Hospital Group Inc. Coolstore Road HASTINGS 3915 (03) 5979 0333
- The Bays Hospital - Mornington The Bays Hospital Group Inc 262-268 Main Street MORNINGTON 3931 (03) 59 75 2009
- Walwa & District Bush Nursing Hospital Inc Walwa and District Bush Nursing Hospital Inc. Murray River Road WALWA 3709 (02) 6037 1220
- Warley Hospital Inc Warley Hospital Inc 12 Warley Avenue COWES 3922 (03) 5952 2345
- Yackandandah Bush Nursing Hospital Inc Yackandandah Bush Nursing Hospital Inc 20 Isaacs Avenue YACKANDANDAH 3749 (02) 6027 1208

There are 13 surviving Bush Nursing Centres: Balmoral, Bucha, Cann River, Dargo, Dartmoor, Dingee, Elmhurst, Gelantipy, Harrow, Lake Bolac, Lockington, Swift's Creek and Woomelang.

Further Reading

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Shallard, Heather J "Somebody's Baby" History of the Pakenham & District Hospital 1926-92, Pakenham and District Hospital Inc, 1992

Sullivan, John Memorable Decisions: Euroa Hospital 1927 - 2002, Euroa Health, 2002

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